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October 13, 1997

Published Oct. 14, 1997

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To The Editor  
Samoa News///Samoa Journal

Toll free 800/888 number service is extremely important to our community. So here are some further details.

The Office of Communications told the FCC in its October 1, 1997 submission that : quote: "Telephone subscribers in American Samoa can obtain access to toll free area codes (that is 800 and 888) on a toll free basis without requiring American Samoa to participate in the North American Numbering Plan (a domestic area code)". The following will show you why this official statement of the Government, is not what it pretends to be.

I wrote in a previous letter to the Editor that a domestic area code was, as practical matter, absolutely required by the carriers (AT&T, Sprint, MCI, GTE) to give us access in American Samoa to 800/888 number toll free service – from American Samoa to the rest of the United States. And this is true.

Here is what the Office of Communications is failing to tell us: The handful of 800 numbers that now exist from American Samoa, are in what the carriers designate as a special category. They are called "international 800 toll free numbers'.

These "international 800 toll free numbers" cost the entity or person in the United States requesting this service \$2.15 per minute. In other words, you dial one of the 800 toll free numbers from American Samoa, and the company at the other end in the mainland is paying \$2.15 per minute for your call.

However, if American Samoa had a domestic area code, the 800 number provider would be paying only 12 cents per minute for your 800 number phone call from American Samoa. This is what domestic 800 number providers in the U.S. mainland are paying for 800 toll free calls from Guam, Saipan, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Paying \$2.15 per minute for toll free 800 number calls from American Samoa, is out of the question for practically every business in the United States. (These rates quoted are from AT&T and similar rates are applied from the other carriers.")

So once again, we are not told the whole truth by the Office of Communication. And the obvious fact remains, that without a domestic area code, we will not have all the domestic 800 toll free access which is available to every other State and Territory in the United States.

Why is the American Samoa Government Office of Communication insisting that we will not have a domestic area code? The real answer is not expense. The requirement of a fiber optic cable, or any cable from American Samoa to another point in the United States is "absolute nonsense". These are the words of another technical expert in a major carrier, whom I talked to last Friday afternoon. He also stated that Saipan started in August two months ago, using a domestic area code and satellites, not using any cable. Guam, he said, at the cross roads of a Pacific cable, uses its excess capacity, but has satellites for backup. Satellite or cable, he said, it is just a "pipe". Technical experts are incredulous that this could be a believable issue in American Samoa.

Neither is the real answer that it would be a lot of trouble to change our area code. (Actually, we would do the same as Guam and Saipan; that is, keep our same area code 684, and simply dial it as a USA domestic area code. Guam still has 671 and Saipan 670.)

The real truth, is something, once again, that the American Samoa Government Office of Communications is not telling us: If American Samoa Government avoids a domestic area code, then they can remain an "international" point for accounting settlement purposes with connecting carriers. This allows them to maintain a system of higher rates and greater settlement profit from connecting carriers, particularly on outbound calls.

So the American Samoa Government wants to continue the fiction that we are not part of the domestic United States. In the 1996 Telecommunications Act, Congress has said in effect: "Stop this nonsense". And we will see what the FCC says, very soon.

What is the reason for all this posturing? In the final analysis the Government is seeking to retain its easy profits from the phone users, no matter how it hobbles and weakens our community with unconscionably high rates, and no 800 toll free numbers. No other community under the American Flag has to put up with this. No community belonging to the USA pays 60 cents a minute, or even 30 cents a minute to call another community of the United States.

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The local government under the present system siphons off 6 to 7 million dollars a year from local phone users (and it is off budget). Has anyone thought of what it would mean to our local economy to put this \$6 or \$7 million dollars in real money back in the individual pockets of the people? Has anyone considered how this would give a multiplying boost to our economy: the boost this would give to families that are now struggling and to our local businesses that are in the doldrums.? In our small community this would have a tremendous effect.

George Wray

Letter to the Editor  
Samoa News //// Samoa Journal  
October 9, 1997

Published on October 10, 1997

Dear Editor:

I read with interest the colorful comments exchanged between Lewis Wolman, Publisher of the Samoa News, and Aleki Sene, ASG Director of Communications on the requirement of expensive fiber optic cable for us to have a domestic area code (joining the North American Numbering Plan [NANP]).

Though Lewis Wolman's knowledge in this technical area is not great, his instincts for the truth and common sense are well founded.

I was in Washington DC for 10 days during the end of September visiting the FCC and interviewing the carriers AT&T, MCI, Sprint, etc. serving American Samoa, and had discussions with House and Senate Committees staff in Congress. I did this voluntarily because our community has been so abused by Aleki Sene's stewardship in charging unnecessarily high rates for our telephone needs, that any caring person is compelled to put a stop to it.

When I was there Governor Tauese made his comments published in the Samoa News September 25th. stating: "Tauese said that we cannot adopt the NANP [domestic area code] without a fiber optic cable link to the rest of the world, and we don't have such an expensive thing."

The Governor's comments were widely read, and I asked the technical people involved in the NANP and domestic area codes about any requirement for a fiber optic cable. They uniformly said that having a domestic area code has nothing to do with fiber optic cable, and any assertions of this kind is "outrageous nonsense". One carrier pointed out that Alaska has had a domestic area code for many, many years without fiber optic cable. Saipan started in August this year using a domestic area code with no fiber optic cable, just satellites.

I was embarrassed for the Governor, and told everyone that the Governor was only quoting information from Aleki Sene, his Director of Communications. It made the Governor look extremely foolish. The Governor has a right to expect intelligent, non conniving advice from his Directors

Then I read Aleki Sene's comments published in the Samoa News on October 6th, regarding the high cost of getting a domestic area code for American Samoa, stating (quote): "Governor Tauese's reference to the huge cost (millions or billions) was related to the cost of extending a fiber optic cable to the nearest U.S. soil (Hawaii) to American Samoa. Depending on the design capacity, this cable extension could cost up to \$100 million." (unquote)

Giving Governor Tauese this wildly inaccurate advice, and making him a laughing stock to the professional world, could only come from incompetence, in which case, the Director of Communications should be fired tomorrow. Or it could come from conniving to kill a domestic area code for American Samoa, in which case, the Director of Communications should have been fired long before yesterday.

Aleki Sene's statement that a Domestic Area Code would cost another 3.5 million in reprogramming expense, etc., should not be trusted. He has an agenda to exaggerate and make it look costly. He has never offered support which we can examine for this expense. And if true, this amount equals only six months of the excess cash he generates every year. This is where it should be spent.

On the issue of 800 numbers for American Samoa, the statements by Aleki Sene in his submission to the FCC implying that we now have free and ready access to toll free 800 numbers is disingenuous, to say the least. We do not have this access. We, as a community, urgently need this access. Guam now has this access. The reason: Guam has a domestic area code.

What all the U.S. carriers will tell anyone who cares enough to ask, is that without a domestic area code, there is no hope for American Samoa to obtain 800 toll free access as the rest of the States and Territories now enjoy. The Carriers all state that there are serious technical difficulties, and an almost insurmountable billing problem for them, because domestic marketed 800 numbers will only recognize domestic area codes. The Governor should ask the carriers about this directly, as I hav

In his recent letter to the FCC, the Governor was apparently told by Aleki Sene that American Samoa's Rate Integration Plan was developed "in consultation" with carriers and the views of the Fono. Governor should read for himself the carriers' comments on the American Samoa Plan, which are due next Thursday, October 16th, and see how well they regard the American Samoa Plan. This plan does not meet the intentions of Congress although ASG tries to skate under an anomaly in the law; and it certainly is not what the FCC expected of a Territorial Government in support of its people.

Finally, each and every one of the carriers now serving American Samoa, told me directly, that if we would just follow the three recommendations ( domestic area code, 1+ dialing, and joining NECA ) which the FCC gave us in its July 30th, 1997 Order, they would each be required as a matter of law to give us at least as good a deal as they are giving Guam. And in the case of MCI, this is now a nickel per minute between Guam and every State (that is 5 cents per minute) during each and every Sunday. Just ask the folks in Guam. They will tell you that it's true.

If our Government would just cooperate, we could have this, too.

George Wray